



5 June 2020

Dear Head Teachers and SENCOs,

**Re: Key suggestions from parent carers for schools/colleges working to support their CYP with SEND during CV19**

We are hearing from parent carers about some really positive things some schools are managing to do to support CYP with SEND at this time of crisis. We also recognise how difficult this particular period must be for all of you.

East Sussex Parent Carer Forum (ESPCF) and Amaze are in touch with many families accessing our services and support and via our social media channels, so we have access to up to date views of this community of families. We also carried out a snapshot survey in April and the findings are detailed at the end of this letter. From this we would like to share with you our key messages or suggestions for continuing to provide the best support to these vulnerable families.

**1. Prioritise SEND children to return to school**

We understand this is hugely complex, especially as you are now trying to accommodate bringing back whole year groups, but we urge you to prioritise CYP on SEN Support or with an EHCP, in order to avoid the significant risks of isolation and the 'attainment gap' widening. This could be either opportunities for returning to school to access learning, or enhanced input/support for off-site learning. We are hearing from more families with CYP with an EHCP, who originally were saying they wanted to keep their child at home, now saying they need their child to return to school.

As we're sure you're aware and as set out in ESCC's return to school recovery plan, any return strategy needs to address the increased levels of anxiety and develop a range of solutions e.g. buddy systems/resources/videos to (re)acquaint pupils with a school setting, in particular for those at a key stage transition point (see point 5 below).

**2. Complete regular risk assessments**

We know the decisions about whether it is safer to return children with an EHCPs to school are incredibly complex, and need to follow the completion of a personalised risk assessment. However, we have heard from many families who do not know if a risk assessment has been carried out for their child, so we urge you to double check that families in your school are involved in this process, ideally coproducing and signing these off.

We appreciate the capacity challenge for your teams in this but we know many families who might have been coping at the start of lock down, are now really struggling, so it may be necessary to repeat risk assessments where home circumstances have changed due to cumulative impacts over time. Families suggest calls to them are preceded by a text to alert them to say why you are calling and when.

**3. Provide specific communications to children/young people (CYP) with SEND and their families**

Families have told us how much they value empathetic and targeted comms from school leaders to the SEND community at this time. They have even sent us in examples of letters they like! We know you are working hard to keep in touch with all families, but encourage you to consider the below suggestions from parent carers when writing to SEND families. Please note ESPCF and Amaze are

happy to help co-produce comms re. SEND if that is helpful at any stage (and we can be quick to respond!).

- Clarify the offer for CYP with EHCPs/SEN Support
- Articulate the commitment of the school to support your CYP with SEND and siblings if still at home
- Include information around available support, differentiating work, resources a CYP with SEND may need (including any tech support)
- Actively promote the school's (and other community-based) mental health and wellbeing service/support that is available for CYP
- Acknowledge parent carers may need support from the school or therapists to support their CYPs learning profile and how to access this
- Acknowledge CYP with SEND benefit from direct, regular friendly contact with familiar school staff- teachers and support staff (see below)
- When making phone calls to parents to 'check-in' or undertake risk assessments, precede these by a text to alert them to say why you are calling and when.
- When communicating about any return strategy address the increased levels of anxiety and offer a range of solutions e.g. buddy systems/resources/videos to (re)acquaint pupils with a school setting, in particular for those at a key stage transition point (see point 5.)

#### **4. Provide differentiated learning resources, including video contact**

As lockdown looks set to continue for most, we ask that all schools and colleges provide CYP with SEND with the necessary, differentiated learning resources and equipment to support their ongoing learning and development at home. This includes working with health partners to deliver the necessary therapeutic support and also providing support for parent carers with strategies for CYP avoidant of home schooling, emotional support etc.

We have had really positive feedback about regular live video contact with school staff and other pupils, promoting feelings of connectedness and improving CYP motivation. We are aware this is not being encouraged by some teaching unions but many schools are providing this and have found a way to counteract the safeguarding concerns. We ask the equity of this provision is looked into and video use encouraged for SEND CYP wherever possible.

#### **5. Transitions videos**

As above, families have suggested schools make videos for children starting a new key stage, and that these might be useful for any child returning to a setting after a long break. We know many schools are planning to make these anyway but we include their content suggestions in case of help:

- i. Welcome (back) to our School - from Head/SENCO – we're looking forward to seeing you soon. Recognition it's hard not having been in school for such long period of time but this video to try to help (remind you) show you what this school is like to help you on first day
- ii. Meet your class teacher
- iii. Tour of main school building/rooms (entrance, reception/office, classrooms, hall, dinner hall, sports hall/changing room, toilets, playground)
- iv. Reminder of key values/ethos of the school e.g. inclusion?
- v. What's a typical school day like here? (Different subjects/lessons)- playtimes/breaks for the older cohort
- vi. Some exciting extracurricular stuff you can get involved in
- vii. Describing the uniform
- viii. Describing the food
- ix. What extra help you can get e.g. SEND resources, quiet room etc
- x. Be great if you could get key worker CYP to come up with the script and front the videos?

Families have also suggested the idea of making a 'goodbye' video for those leaving key stages.

**We hope this information is useful for your CV19 planning. Please do share our suggestions with your wider team and let us know if you have any feedback, or if we can help with any of your comms with families.**

Finally, do please feel free to promote the Amaze SENDIASS Helpline to families who you think might need extra support. It is open Monday to Friday, 9.30am to 2.30pm. Call 01273 772289 or via <https://amazesussex.org.uk/parent-carers/services-and-support/sendias-helpline/> Amaze has developed a new web page full of CV19 advice specific to families with CYP with SEND living in East Sussex. Please do promote this: <https://amazesussex.org.uk/coronavirus-advice/> ESPCF also has a really useful resources page on their website specifically for families with CYP with SEND who are continuing to learn from home which you may also like to share <https://www.espcf.org.uk/coronavirus-covid-19-useful-resources-for-families/>

Yours sincerely,





Jo Nye  
Interim Chair  
East Sussex Parent Carer Forum (ESPCF)

and

Rachel Travers  
CEO  
Amaze

#### **Key findings from B&H and East Sussex reports:**

The summary findings are below:

	<b>High levels of stress and anxiety:</b> COVID19 is clearly causing a high degree of anxiety and worry to both children and young people with SEND and their parent carers about a wide range of issues such as: contracting the virus, keeping their family safe, not being able to support their child with learning, coping without PAs/respite, child's worsening mental health or behaviour, worrying about loss of income/employment, impact on siblings etc
	<b>Worsening of child and family mental health and wellbeing for most:</b> Having CYP w SEND at home 24/7 is exhausting and challenging, especially without access to other support services, respite, the outdoors or other activities. This is impacting negatively on many children's (and their parent carers') wellbeing and behaviour. This is coupled with anxiety as to how child(ren) will re-integrate back in school after lockdown.
	<b>Parents need more help to support home learning:</b> Many parents said they are not getting the support they need from their child's school. Some parents said they don't have the capacity or skills to support their child's learning, or that the work the school is sending home is not differentiated or appropriate to their child's needs.
	<b>Concerns about their child's progress or plans for the future:</b> Several families said they are lacking access to (Speech and Language, Physiotherapy, CAMHS and Occupational) therapies or contact with other health services. They are concerned about the impact of delays to their child's diagnosis or assessments and therefore referrals into services. Some families are concerned that their CYP w SEND will be falling (even further) behind in school which may make re-integration back into class harder. Parents also cited worries about their child's transition to a new setting in September 2020.

Our letters to MPs and full reports can be found in at

[https://amazesussex.org.uk/amaze\\_news/brighton-hove-parent-carers-experiences-of-covid-19/](https://amazesussex.org.uk/amaze_news/brighton-hove-parent-carers-experiences-of-covid-19/)